

ELKO DAILY FREE PRESS

FRIDAY APRIL 29, 2005 Last modified: Thursday, April 28, 2005 5:13 PM PDT

Forest Service OKs Jarbidge plan: Environmental study calls for primitive road, partial trail

By DAVE WOODSON - Staff Writer

ELKO - Controversy over South Canyon Road continues in the wake of a final environmental impact statement issued this week by the U.S. Forest Service.

Forest Service officials said portions of South Canyon Road will be open as a primitive road for four-wheel drive vehicles, while a section will be open only to hikers and horseback riders.

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor Bob Vaught released the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision regarding the road Wednesday.

According to the Forest Service, that decision calls for a primitive road with low-water crossings, suitable for high-clearance, four-wheel drive vehicles, from Pine Creek Campground to the Urdahl area (a distance of 1.2 miles) and a non-motorized hiking trail for horses and pedestrians from the Urdahl area to the Jarbidge Wilderness portal at Snowslide Gulch (a length of 0.4 miles).

Elko County Commissioner John Ellison said this morning he didn't think the decision would be acceptable to Elko County.

He also noted it would not halt motorized use of the road to the trailhead at Snowslide Gulch.

"The guys in the four-wheel drives will pioneer it up to the wilderness," he said. "They can't stop them."

Ellison said the only way the Forest Service could prevent motorized access to the wilderness would be to station law enforcement agents.

"This decision is a compromise of use and protection," Vaught said in a news release.

He said the Forest Service determined that the construction required for a high-standard road to



accommodate passenger vehicle access would be more detrimental to the stream and habitat for the threatened bull trout than allowing high clearance, four-wheel drive recreational vehicle use on the existing road location.

Assemblyman John Carpenter, R-Elko, said he did not want to comment in detail on the environmental impact statement until he consulted with Elko County officials. However, he did say he believes the Forest Service decision was not in agreement with the county's position.

"I don't think so," he said. "I think there is going to be some concern on the road."

Carpenter said the Forest Service's definition of a primitive road was unclear.

"I don't know what they mean by high clearance," Carpenter said.

He said the decision would not be acceptable if it required anyone who wanted to use the road to have a "super four-wheel drive power wagon."

"I think a four-wheel-drive pickup that I could buy off the lot or showroom, that's what I am talking about," Carpenter said. "I think that is all we really want or need."

He also said the final half-mile to the trailhead being limited to foot or horse traffic might not be acceptable.

"I don't know whether that is right or not," Carpenter said. "We were thinking maybe you could use an ATV."

Forest Service officials said that by leaving the route a 4-wheel drive route to Urdahl and providing a non-motorized trail beyond Urdahl, the decision meets the needs of a variety of recreation uses, including off-highway vehicles, hikers, and equestrians; and helps to maintain a healthy river and riparian habitat.

The entire record of decision can be obtained by contacting Jim Winfrey at 775-778-6129.

The decision can be implemented no sooner than five days after the 45-day appeal period as required under the Forest Service appeal regulations.

If there is an appeal, implementation could not occur prior to 15 days after the ending of the appeal period.

-- CLOSE WINDOW --